

Now, That's Really Cosmic!



Cosmic Software is a relative newcomer to the scene of software distribution for the TRS-80 Models I and III and the System 80. Here Eduardas M Grigonis examines some of the games packages from the fledgling company.

COSMIC SOFTWARE specialises in Australian-written games software, but the New South Wales-based company is also expanding into the importation of quality games from the United States.

Each of the five games I am reviewing was originally obtained on tape, and all loaded easily. However, Cosmic is currently in the process of preparing disk versions of all its Australian software.

I used the LDOS CMDFILE utility to transfer the programs to disk, with an appropriate offset. DOSPLUS users can use the TAPE utility and NEWDOS users can use LMOFFSET.

Cosmic Software has available a Load Module Offset program for TRSDOS users. This costs about \$5 when purchased with any other program, or \$19.95 separately.

Unlike many companies, Cosmic Software has a commendable upgrade policy for games software. Anyone who wants to upgrade to a later version of a game – for example, Version 2 of Rally Racer – can simply return his original tape and \$2 to the company.

Many of the games offered are also being upgraded to provide joystick com-

patibility. (Unfortunately, Defence Penetrator – reviewed here – isn't one of them.)

At the time of writing this review, the prices for each of Cosmic Software's Australian programs was \$19.95. At the risk of upsetting some distributors I should point out that people buying direct from the company can expect to receive a voucher entitling them to a \$5 credit against their next purchase from the company.

Cosmic Software has established itself in a short time as a creditable source of interesting games programs for the TRS-80 Models I and III and the System 80.

If you have a penchant for games, then I recommend you have a look at what Cosmic Software has to offer.

Star Cresta

When I first decided to write this review, some months ago, I intended to begin with something like, "If this had been the only program I bought at the time, then I would probably have never bought another program from Cosmic Software. Fortunately, at the same time, I also bought Defence Penetrator..."

I have since changed my mind. This is not to say that I don't still have some doubts about the program. However, in the interests of giving a fair review, I resurrected it from the months of disuse that resulted from my initial disappointment. Lo and behold, after spending a fair amount of time with Star Cresta, I began to appreciate its finer points.

Based on that arcade favourite, Firebird Phoenix (or was it Moon Cresta?), Star Cresta requires that you succeed in destroying three successive frames of aliens before getting a chance at the massive mothership.

In each of the first two frames, you're up against a dozen small 'birds' which first appear in a standard formation – depending on the frame – and then proceed to fly all over the screen whilst you try to destroy them. These small 'birds' are worth 80 points each.

The third frame presents you with 12 large birds which are each worth 150 points. To destroy them, you have to hit them right in the centre. Unlike the original arcade game, you don't get points for shooting their wings off.

If you manage to make it through to the fourth frame, you find the mothership. This is worth 2000 points, but it will take many hits before it is destroyed. The first problem is that you have to shoot through the bottom shield of the ship. Once this has been achieved, you have to shoot through a revolving panel. If you can then manage to shoot through the holes you have made in the revolving panel, you eventually get through to the occupant of the mothership, which results in its destruction. You then return to the first frame and try to rack up even more points.

The controls for this game are basic. Movement is controlled by the left and right arrow keys, and firing is achieved by pressing the space bar. If the space bar is kept down, firing is continuous,

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ough only one of your shots may be on the screen at any time.

You also have the option of pressing the @ key or the ? key to apply a force-shield to stop the aliens shots from hitting you. That's right! The aliens are firing back at you, and they have no qualms about having a multitude of shots on the screen at the same time.

An extra ship is awarded at each multiple of 10,000 points.

There are a couple of problems with the game. One 'feature' is a 'realistic scrolling starscape', but I have found this nothing but a nuisance. As a result of this feature, it is sometimes impossible to know when you are being shot at! There is extreme frustration when, suddenly and for no apparent reason, you're blasted from the skies. This scrolling starscape would be most impressive when going between frames but on a black-and-white screen it has no value during actual playing of the game.

In a game of this type, it is virtually standard practice that, after being hit, you return to where you left off. In Star Cresta, however, you return to the beginning of whichever frame you got wiped out in. This was one of my major sources of frustration when I first tried the game.

Is this program worth buying? If you like arcade games, yes, go out and buy it. Be prepared for some initial frustration but you'll eventually find yourself engrossed.

My highest score so far is 116,250, which was achieved well into the 19th round.

Defence Penetrator

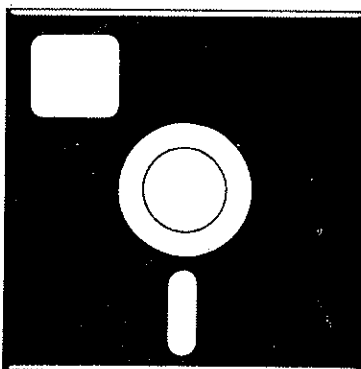
Defence Penetrator is Cosmic Software's version of the Scramble arcade game. Your mission is to navigate an alien landscape and destroy the enemy's command headquarters.

The first item you are presented with is the title page. This provides details of possible scores - fuel tanks are worth 10 points and provide extra fuel, missiles are worth 30 points, laser cannons gain 50 points and the command base is worth 2000 points. Reactors can be worth any amount, but I usually get about 300 or 400 points. Some reactors are hidden below the surface, so you can sometimes gain points for bombing seemingly empty terrain.

The program doesn't contain any built-in instructions. Direction is controlled by the four arrow keys. Diagonal movement is possible - however, the left and right arrows really only slow down or speed up your craft, rather than allow changes in direction. The trend is for flight to the right.

The space bar fires torpedoes to the right of your craft; only three torpedoes

your computer



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can be on the screen at the one time. Bombs are dropped by pressing either of the shift keys; only two bombs can be on the screen at the one time.

The game may be aborted at any time by pressing the 8 and 9 keys.

The mountains are the first part of terrain that you have to overcome. As you fly over this area, missiles are launched at you. You gain points for destroying the missiles and also for dropping bombs on the fuel tanks and reactors, which progressively appear.

The next part is lower terrain, where you will again find fuel tanks and reactors. The missiles have been replaced by laser cannons, the shots of which you have to avoid. You also find enemy craft coming at you from the right of the screen. These aren't easy to destroy.

The third level replaces the enemy craft with meteors. These are impossible to destroy and must be avoided.

If you make it this far, the next step involves entering an underground silo complex, containing missiles, fuel tanks, reactors and laser cannons.

The final stage is a short, hilly area, containing the same obstacles, which leads to the command base. Your aim needs to be accurate to hit the command base.

There is no provision to store the highest 10 scores - the game simply keeps a record of the highest score obtained so far. I would prefer to see provision for more high scores. Apart from that aspect I have no real complaints about 'Defence Penetrator'.

Stellar Warp

The third program reviewed is Stellar Warp. Containing similarities to the Moon Cresta arcade favourite (or was it Firebird Phoenix...), Stellar Warp is the one program of the five reviewed that I feel would stand the most chance of selling reasonably well in the United States.

This is the only program of the five with voice sound effects in addition to

normal sound. The vocabulary is limited (five words only) but it is good to see an Australian programmer trying such techniques.

The game does not include instructions or scoring details in the actual program. Scores are gained for Razor Blades (30 points), Pods (50 points), Spankers (80 points) and Solaroids (100 points).

These craft are attacking you from the top of the screen and you need to move under them using the left and right arrow keys before firing with the space-bar. Firing is continuous if the space-bar is held down although you are restricted to only having three shots on the screen at the same time. The aliens are also shooting at you and have the ability to fire diagonally.

You will also occasionally find the Obliterator moving down the screen. This cannot be destroyed by your shots but it will eventually self-destruct and throw out gamma particles which will either reduce your shield power or destroy your ship.

The status of your shield is indicated at the top centre of the screen. A whole line indicates that the shield is in reasonable condition and you can therefore sustain hits without being destroyed. A broken line indicates that a hit could be fatal. If the line is broken it can be restored if you manage to go for a while without being hit.

A good option when in difficulties is to hit the enter key. This activates Stellar Warp which moves you up the screen and enables you to ram the alien craft. As there is only one warp per ship, this option is best left as a last resort.

The game may be aborted at any time by pressing the '8' and '9' keys. Extra ships are awarded at every 10,000 points.

If you are determined to buy a program this week then I strongly recommend Stellar Warp.

Provision is included to show the current Top Ten scores and the initials of the person responsible.

Rally Racer

The reason I originally decided to write this article is that I was asked to review version 2 of Cosmic Software's Rally Racer. (I guess being in charge of the Adelaide Micro-User Group's Gaming Sub-group has its advantages!) I originally purchased version 1 of Rally Racer some time ago and I was interested to see how the new version rated.

When you first run Rally Racer you will notice a source of dissatisfaction. The program comes with a high score built in. Although this is now only 10,000 points (as opposed to the high score of 20,480 in version 1) I consider that as

no provision is made in the game for other than the highest score and the most recent score, the inclusion of a built in score that will take some time to exceed is unwise and a source of frustration to the user.

You will also find that, unlike version 1 which has only one speed, version 2 gives you the option of playing in Trainee Mode (press T) or Road Warrior mode (press R). As the standard speed of the program is fast, the provision of a slower speed to enable familiarisation with the program is welcome.

The object of Rally Racer is to steer your car through a maze and attempt to hit flags to score points. At the same time you have to avoid Morgan the Mad Motorist and Crazy Harry and his hoodlums. Morgan can go to any part of the maze (he can go through walls) whereas the others will follow the most direct route leading them to you.

Occasionally you will find an oil slick in the maze. If you run into the slick this will cause you to crash. If you are being chased by the other cars you have the option of creating a smoke screen by pressing the space-bar. This will slow down your pursuers but will also use up fuel.

On balance, I would have to recommend Rally Racer to any of you who are

looking for something different from your normal run-of-the-mill arcade games.

Morgoth - The Arcade Adventure

Of the five games reviewed, Morgoth is the one which I enjoy the most. If you can rationalise an 'arcade adventure', then Morgoth is for you.

The object of the game is to kill monsters, collect treasures, avoid Morgoth and complete as many sets as possible. Movement is made by pressing any of the four arrow keys. Firing of arrows is achieved by pressing the spacebar and either the left or right arrow. You can only shoot left or right although all you machine-language buffs out there will be interested to know that the code to enable firing up or down is still in the program and has simply been disabled. It was found that leaving this facility in detracted from the playability of the game.

The game is set in the realm of Thrandabar. You begin in The Caverns of Moria. You will find treasures scattered about, indicated by a hash symbol. Occasionally you will also find bonus treasures indicated by a question mark. The values of the treasures are gained simply by moving over them. You will also find fireballs, which are indestructible and to be avoided, and Morgoth.

If you survive the Caverns you should try to escape into Smeagor's Keep. You will find more treasures, accompanied by Morgoth (he gets around) and monsters. Eventually you will find your way out of the Keep into the Forest Of Mirkwood. This contains Morgoth, more monsters and treasures and trees. Should you be unlucky enough to become entangled in the trees, escape is impossible.

The only creatures you can kill are the monsters. Anything else should be avoided. Morgoth will only succumb to the most powerful of magic weapons, which I take to mean the average mortal has no hope. Trees are also deadly, not to mention mobile.

Morgoth comes with provision to store the current Top Ten scores. Although there are already ten random high scores built into the program, none of them is insurmountable. Some thought has gone into this element of the game as you will find yourself trying to better the scores of such luminaries as Conan, Hammerhead and Firefist.

Morgoth is a successful attempt to provide something different in the way of arcade games for the TRS-80 and is highly recommended. Although technically not up to the standard of Stellar Warp, it is more enjoyable. ☐

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